

Running in circle. 11th congress of Rukh leaves the party in crisis

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«We allowed them to regain their footing after the post-coup shock, to regroup themselves in a new way... democratic organizations allowed themselves «lending» their banners to the people who hardly have the right to stand under them...»

Vyacheslav Chornovil, Holos Ukrainy, January 24, 1992

These words of Chornovil were his comment to the December 1991 presidential election results, but they are still relevant today. Furthermore, today they may be interpreted more broadly - partly because the processes in the right-wing side of the political spectrum have become routinely viewed as complex and equivocal. Their complex and mixed nature derives from right-wing parties' persistent inability to be consistent and adequate in their assessments of political situation and react to demands and needs of the society. However, the answers proposed and the assessments made may cause even more questions. A key components of the situation is the crisis of determining a leader (leaders) of the Ukrainian right-wing political camp - and, hence, the parties' general positions on specific issues. A typical example was the 11th congress of the People's Rukh of Ukraine held in Lviv on May 5-6.

The congress was attended by 644 out of 698 elected delegates and was organized in a format of a report-and-election meeting, and the agenda included election of the chairman, the party's leading bodies, adoption of an updated Program and Statute of the party, approval of the official symbols of the Rukh and discussion of the issue of joining an election block.

The People's Rukh of Ukraine is one of the oldest Ukrainian parties, established in Kyiv on September 8-9, 1989. As a mass public-political organization, the Rukh was registered by the Soviet of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR on February 9, 1990, and was registered as a political party by the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine on February 1, 1993. From the moment of establishment and to his death on March 25, 1999, the party leader was Vyacheslav Chornovil.

The current contradictions within the party are linked to the complicated regard of break-ups that have shaken the party since the end of 1998. A key bone of contention that caused the political rivalry was the choice of the Rukh's candidate to run for presidency in the 1999 election. In February 1999, at the session called by chairman of the party's Secretariat Bohdan Boiko, 29 out of 55 members of the Central Provid (council) of the Rukh announced no confidence in the party leader, Chornovil. A few days before, on February 20, 1999, 30 out of 48 members of the Rukh faction in the parliament elected Yuri Kostenko as their leader. At that time Chornovil was criticized for what many of the party activists saw as authoritarian approach to running the party, and for the failure to establish adequately active relations with other national-democratic parties. One of the reasons of the «lack of understanding» in the Rukh was the fact that Vyacheslav Chornovil nominated former Foreign Minister of Ukraine Hennady Udovenko as the Rukh's candidate to run for presidency in 1999. The «internal opposition» called their extra 10th congress on February 28, while supporters of Chornovil (13 local and regional organizations) scheduled their congress for March 6. Vyacheslav Chornovil then described attempts to break up the Rukh as «the extreme of political cynicism», for it was impossible to elect delegates to the congress as required by the party statute.

The 10th congress of the Rukh, held after the death of Vyacheslav Chornovil, 346 out of 368 delegates voted for electing Udovenko as the party leader, and nominated him for candidacy in the presidential elections, and also approved amendments to the party Statute. The breakaway part of the Rukh nominated Yuri Kostenko as their candidate for the presidential race. Yet, both of the candidates lost dramatically in the 1999 presidential election: Kostenko received 569,000 votes (2.17%), and Udovenko received 318,689 votes (1.22%). As a result, two factions in the Ukrainian parliament refer to themselves as «Rukh». Furthermore, there is a third Rukh force, a party led by Bohdan Boiko, «Rukh for Unity», founded in Kyiv on November 25, 2000.

The 11th assembly of the People's Rukh of Ukraine took place after the two Rukh's the Reforms and

Order, the Sobor and the Batkivshchyna announced their opposition to the «communo-oligarchic power» that had denied confidence to the Victor Yushchenko government. The joint statement, issued by the parties, read: «Among all resolutions and laws, the Verkhovna Rada has adopted the most absurd one. We dismissed the first national, honest government of Ukraine, which, within a year of its activity, has achieved positive results that all of the previous governments had failed to do.» According to the statement, being in opposition meant that the parties' parliamentary factions would not take part in forming the next government.

After declaring the opposition, the Rukh faced the challenge of filling the claim with some practical content. However, as the developments at the recent assembly may suggest, the party leadership is not united about its future. The keynote of the congress was the election of the party chairman and, accordingly, defining guidelines for the party's future course.

The congress adopted a new party program that declared a «clearly formulated ideology» - that of «the ideology of Ukrainian national democracy». The national democracy was defined as an ideology of synthesis that unites values of conservatism, liberalism, and social democracy, that aims at practicing these values in a national democratic state of a European type. The Rukh's motto, «Changes Needed!», has been transformed into «Statehood, Democracy, Reforms!» The party program stressed the need for party pluralism and stipulated that the People's Rukh of Ukraine, as a center-right national-democratic party, cooperates with political organizations whose programs define their tasks as building an independent democratic Ukrainian state, preserving its territorial integrity, reforming its economy in the interests of the broadest circles of the population.

The key method of deeper cooperation is seen by the People's Rukh of Ukraine as formation of election coalitions, electoral and political blocks. It has declared the wish to unite with the closest political parties into a single party built on the principles of pursuing fundamental values of national democracy based on a national idea. The party has argued that the Ukraine needs a nation-consolidating ideology. Its keystone should be the Ukrainian national idea envisaging «political, economic, information independence of Ukraine, its independent way of development in accordance with traditions, national uniqueness and mental peculiarities of the Ukrainian people» (Interfax-Ukraine, May 6, 2001). The key notions of that ideology should be ideological pluralism, tolerance, and societal mutual understanding on principle issues of the Ukrainian statehood and democracy.

Another critical point of the congress was the voiced approval of the establishment of an electoral block with the Party of Reforms and Order and the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists for taking part in the 2002 parliamentary election. It was proposed to name the would-be block after Vyacheslav Chornovil. However, it is unclear how successful the attempt to form a broad right-centrist coalition will be. The doubts relate to the parties' perspectives on roles and contents of «being in opposition» and internal contradictions in the People's Rukh of Ukraine. Commenting on the situation in the party, a Rukh leader Mykhailo Kosiv put it bluntly: «nowadays the PRU has lost its face and became one of 120 parties, registered by the Minjust (i.e., the Ministry of Justice) that are dragging at the tail of events and can no longer influence anything» (UNIAN, May 6, 2001). Hence, a conflict point that made the congress tense was the debate about the party's future role and activity. Commenting on the sentiments in the Rukh, then member of the party Taras Chornovil argued: «there is an anti-presidential and a pro-presidential positions in the party». Noteworthy, he was invited to the congress as a guest, for «regardless of the support of the majority of participants of the Lviv regional party conference, [he] was not elected as a delegate of the congress and even did not receive an invitation [to take part in it]». Making predictions about the congress's performance in the context of contradictions of the «positions» Taras Chornovil, a leader of the «Za Pravdu!» Civic Committee argued: «looking at the congress, it's already seen» that representatives of the People's Rukh of Ukraine who stand on positions of critical attitude of the party to the current system of power, are losing» (UNIAN, May 5, 2001). His arguments were based on pointing to contradictions in the Rukh's grass-root organizations. According to Chornovil, the Odessa and the Kyiv city organizations of the Rukh suffered «racket: where [the power establishment] could not use pressure or apply administrative or financial levers, [they] managed severe, brutal destruction of those organizations and created illegitimate organizations» (UNIAN, May 5, 2001).

The complexity of developments in and around the Rukh was demonstrated by the Rukh members' pickets at the entrance to the congress venue. That was a worrying symptom suggesting a difficult course of the congress. The pickets involved about 20 members of the Rukh who were not elected as

delegates, holding posters «Vote for Kosiv!» and «Kosiv is the consciousness of the People's Rukh». The picket proved that the conflict over key issues of the congress had started well before the congress and occurred primarily in regional and city organizations. One of the participants of the picket, until recently member of the council of the Dnipropetrovsk regional organization of the Rukh Andriy Denysenko announced: «those Rukh members could not take part in the congress because they are supporters of Mykhailo Kosiv. He claimed that the conflict had been caused by the fact that some leaders of regional organizations who supported Udovenko «resorted to a number of falsifications during regional conferences in order to make sure supporters of Kosiv do not get to the delegations» (UNIAN, May 5, 2001).

The Rukh puzzle of electing the party chairman primarily consisted of four parts. The Central Provid of the PRU, the Kharkiv regional and the Kyiv city organizations recommended that the congress elected the current party leader Hennady Udovenko, MP. The Chernivtsi, Lviv, Kirovohrad and Vinnytsya regional organizations had their own candidate - Mykhailo Kosiv, MP. A number of local organizations of the Rivne region nominated Taras Chornovil, MP, and the Ternopil regional organization nominated Les Taniuk, MP.

The list of candidates shrunk immediately before the voting, as Taras Chornovil and Les Taniuk withdrew - the former in favor of Mykhailo Kosiv, the latter saying that «let's the big brothers settle it» (UNIAN, May 5, 2001). The «brothers» did. Hennady Udovenko was re-elected as chairman of the Rukh. The open voting of 698 delegates brought him support of 371, with 177 delegates voting against him and 65 abstaining.

Hence, the voting results and the number of dissatisfied members of the Rukh suggest that the party may be facing yet another split-up - regardless of the explicit desire of the rivals to avoid such an outcome. Member of the Ukrainian parliament and supporter of Kosiv Olena Bondarenko said she hoped the election of Udovenko would not cause a new split-up of the Rukh. Yet, internal transformations of the party have already occurred.

On May 6 Taras Chornovil announced his decision to leave the party and join the Party of Reforms and Order. Mykhailo Kosiv also announced he would leave the Rukh. While on May 6 he told the press «so far I am not leaving the party but if I manage to create normal working conditions for myself in the Party of Reforms and Order that has showed interest in my ideas and my understanding of what a national democratic party is, why don't I go there?» (UNIAN, May 6, 2001). Two days later Kosiv announced his formal withdrawal from the Rukh.

In another two days Mykhailo Kosiv spoke about the situation in the Rukh and the party's future in a more open and apocalyptic manner: «nothing can be improved in the Rukh anymore» (Vysoky Zamok, May 8, 2001). He was another party playing the role of a political leader: «the only party that may perform that role is the Party of Reform and Order»... many regional organizations of the Rukh have announced their decision to join that party [i.e., the Party of Reforms and Order]. Given the developments, there may be solid grounds for conflict between the declared political allies. «the so-called strategic development body has launched an unprecedented activity outside the confines of the Statute, provoking Rukh activists of the grass-root organizations for secessionist actions, targeting yet another plot. The worrying sign is that the group of plotters has been joined by intriguants of the PRP (i.e., the Party of Reforms and Order), Rukh activist Georgy Petryk-Popyk argued during the congress (1+1, TSN, May 5, 2001).

Obviously, the conflict potential in relations between the parties may jeopardize the efforts to make a strong election block and have dramatic consequences for the parties' electoral prospects.